

**Rockville Commission on the Environment**  
**Issue Analysis for Mayor & Council:**  
**Tree Management In Rockville's Forest Preserves**  
July 12, 2005

**Issue**

Although Rockville has a policy in place regarding the preservation of forested areas within the City boundaries and has designated eleven "forest preserves," there does not appear to be sufficient tree management procedures for maintenance (trimming) and removal (herein defined as felling a tree and leaving the felled material in place) of hazardous trees along unmarked and unpaved trails within these preserves.

**Background**

The Commission on the Environment (EC) was directed to look at this issue by the Mayor and Council in response to an incident where a number of trees were cut down by the City in the Upper Watts Branch Forest Preserve for reasons of safety. These trees were along unmarked, narrow paths in the preserve. A number of citizens felt that an excessive number of trees were cut down, and that the procedures used (which included the use of a Bobcat skid steer loader for removal) resulted in additional environmental damage to the area. Part of the citizen's unease arose from lack of communication from the City that the tree removal activity was to take place. The EC held a meeting with City staff responsible for tree management, a representative of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, and citizens from College Gardens where the incident took place. As a result of these discussions and further research, EC members believe that there is a need for a clear policy on, and procedure for, maintenance and removal of hazardous trees within forest preserves.

**Recommendations**

**1) Application**

These recommendations for tree management procedures address only unpaved and unmarked trails within the 11 designated "forest preserves". They are not intended for application to trees: along paved or marked trails within forest preserves, adjacent to streets, sidewalks and structures such as houses, sheds and decks; in parks; or along City streets.

**2) Procedures**

Once the City becomes aware of a potentially hazardous tree, the procedures outlined below should be followed.

a) **Tree Hazard Rating**

The City Forester (or other City-appointed certified arborist / Maryland licensed tree care expert) should inspect the suspect tree. During this inspection, a "tree hazard evaluation form" must be completed to provide documentation on the condition of the tree. If other potentially hazardous trees are identified during this inspection, a tree hazard evaluation form must be filled out for each tree slated for maintenance or removal. Maintenance or removal can only occur with completed forms that contain the signature of the City

Forester or other appointed City employee.

b) **Imminent Hazard**

For trees posing an imminent hazard, immediate removal may be necessary. “Imminent hazard” shall herein be defined as any tree with a score of 8 or higher out of 12 on the tree hazard evaluation form, or a score of 7 with a failure potential rating of “high” or “severe” (3 or 4, respectively). In cases of imminent hazards, the tree hazard evaluation form must be accompanied by photo documentation providing additional justification on why immediate removal was required. For all tree removals, low-impact procedures that minimize disturbance (like those often utilized for stream restoration projects) should be employed whenever possible.

c) **Notification**

- i) In the case of trees removed as imminent hazards, the local civic association(s), along with any other groups that “opt-in” to receive such information, should be notified that tree removal activities have occurred and should be provided with the tree hazard evaluation form(s), appropriate photo documentation, and a description of the methodology employed for maintenance or removal.
- ii) Any potentially hazardous tree not removed as an imminent hazard should be added to a “watch-list” for re-inspection at some specified time in the future. This watch-list should be made available to the public on the City’s website.
- iii) Written notification of the number and location of the tree(s) added to the watch-list should be provided to the local civic association(s) and any other groups that “opt-in” to receive such information. Included in this notification should be a copy of the hazard tree evaluation form(s), the proposed methodology for maintenance or removal (incorporating the requirement for low-impact procedures that minimize disturbance), and instructions for citizen comments (*see Paragraph 3*).
- iv) If appropriate, tree replacement recommendations based on the opinion of the City Forester, City Horticulturist, or other City-appointed certified arborist / Maryland licensed tree care expert should be made at this time.

**3) Citizen Comments / Suggestions**

Citizens may make comments or suggestions to the City concerning the actual removal, the methodology employed for that removal, or the tree replacement recommendation. The City will document any citizen comments, and take them into account during any future removal or replanting activities.

**4) Annual Report**

City staff will prepare an annual report addressing city forestry issues, including best practices, recommendations for improved management, and a summary of the issues that have been addressed in the past year and plans for the upcoming year. The report should be forwarded to the Mayor and Council, the Commission on the Environment, and the City Parks Advisory Board, and made available on the City’s website.